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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study of one middle school's experiences with a co-mentoring program for beginning teachers. The project involved teaming to develop a unit on tolerance in order to deal with racial tension among students. The team created a student learning week in which students would reflect upon their own cultural beliefs and views and begin to consider other perspectives; discover the importance of being tolerant and accepting of differences; study the history of institutionalized intolerance; and gain an understanding of vocabulary and concepts containing prejudice and stereotypes. Classroom activities included reading and discussing stories and articles about intolerance, watching and discussing videotapes on racial intolerance, creating timelines about the Holocaust, and conducting Internet research. Schoolwide events included a Random Acts of Kindness contest, a poster contest, and a peaceful pep rally. Surveys of teachers and students indicated that new teachers considered the project successful and wanted to repeat it. Improved student relations were observed, and student groups in the cafeteria became less fixed. It was not easy for all teachers to become involved in this group project. Some were uncomfortable working in a group, and some felt the project took too much planning time. The teacher and student surveys are appended. (SM)

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Co-mentoring as a Strategy to Enhance the First Year of Teaching

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Bishop Byrne Middle and High School is a Professional Development School affiliated with The University of Memphis in a program to improve the quality of teacher education. The university assigns as many preservice teachers as can be accomodated each semester at Bishop Byrne. It, the only secondary school in the university partnership, is a Catholic school offering a college preparatory curriculum with a vo-tech option available through the public schools. The school is located in an urban environment with 260 students (170 African-American, 89 white, 1 Hispanic). Family incomes range from lower to upper middle income. Because of the diversity of the student body, racially, economically, and religiously, it is an ideal place for student teachers to practice with a varied population. They are able to work with students who respect each other's differences and similarities - in fact even like each other.

During Fall, 1997, two student teachers - one in 8th grade English, and one in 11th grade English - spontaneously developed a close working arrangement. They discussed classroom management and teaching methodology, and jointly developed a unit on Edgar Alan Poe, which each successfully presented to his/her classes. This collaboration piqued our interest in co-mentoring, and we decided that we would investigate this topic with preservice teachers during the next (1998 - 1999) school year. Unfortunately for this project, the university did not assign a sufficient number of student teachers in related disciplines to make such a study feasible.

The success of the mentoring program for preservice teachers at Bishop Byrne encouraged the school administration to assign mentors to all newly hired teachers. During the 1997 - 1998 school year, an experienced teacher was assigned as a mentor for each teacher new to the school. This was found to be helpful in introducing new teachers to the school, its procedures and culture; providing the new teachers with a friendly sounding board and problem solver; serving as role model, collaborator, and guide.

There were eight new teachers hired for the 1998 - 1999 school year - more than the supply of available mentors. This was of particular concern in the middle school, where three of the teachers were not only new to the school but new to teaching. The middle school faculty consists of a counselor and six teachers. Their disciplines are English, Mathematics, Religion, Social Studies, Science, and Physical Education. The counselor and the three experienced teachers were very helpful to the new teachers, but the lack of an organized mentor system was felt.

It was decided to initiate a co-mentoring process to attempt to better integrate those new teachers into the school, and to help them cope with those problems of lack of self confidence, classroom management, and methodology common among beginning teachers.

The middle school team has a common planning period. They meet as a team at least once each week - more often if necessary. Early in January, 1999, they agreed to meet one additional day each week specifically to develop a jointly planned interdisciplinary unit. Having observed some evidence of racial tension among their students, they decided to develop a unit on tolerance, using many of the resources available through the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum, and to implement their plans beginning on March 1, 1999. This unit involved the counselor and teachers of English, Science, Mathematics, Religion, and Social Studies. Our study includes the 38 students in the eighth grade.

The team decided upon these objectives for student learning during the week: The student will

1. reflect on his/her own cultural beliefs and views and begin to consider other perspectives.
2. discover the importance of being tolerant of and accepting of individual differences.
3. study the history of institutionalized intolerance and the acts which resulted from that intolerance.
4. gain an understanding of vocabulary and concepts concerning prejudice and stereotypes.

Classroom activities included:

1. Reading and discussing stories and articles concerning intolerance shown to various groups during the twentieth century, and writing essays based on the stories. These included "Home was a Horse Stall," about the internment of Americans of Japanese descent, "Night," by Elie Wiesel, and "Reflections of Dr. Leon Bass."
2. Watching videotapes concerning racial intolerance, and discussion of their content. These included: "Forgotten Genocide," concerning Armenia, "Rwandan Genocide," "Au Revoir les Infants", "Up is Down", "Courage to Care," "A Day in the Warsaw Ghetto," and "Confessions of a Hitler Youth,"
3. Constructing population graphs and solving percentage problems based upon the

Holocaust and other instances of racial repression.

4. Studying photographs from the Holocaust Memorial Museum.

5. Creating time lines concerning the Holocaust.

6. Internet research on words and terms related to intolerance.

Student work was evaluated through:

1. Written answers to discussion questions.

2. Written summaries of the chapters in "Night."

3. Portfolios which included journal entries, time line evaluations, art work, notes from readings, vocabulary lists, a labeled map of German invasions, and a personal reflection on videos.

The middle school started the week with a "Peace Week" assembly during which the purpose of the week was explained, and events of the week were announced. Those events included:

1. A "Random Acts of Kindness" contest. During the week, teachers rewarded students with "Random Act of Kindness" cards each time the teacher witnessed a kind word or deed.

2. A poster contest whose theme was symbols of peace.

3. Collection of items to be placed in a "time capsule." Each homeroom contributed an artifact which reflected their life in the nineties, and each student wrote an essay about his/her hopes for the future. (It is planned to open this capsule in four years - when the students will be high school Seniors.)

4. The wearing of paper clips in emulation of Norwegian support for Holocaust victims during World War II. Groups of students wearing paper clips of different colors were then randomly selected for rewards and for punishments, to dramatize the illogic of intolerance.

5. A "Peaceful Pep Rally" was held at the close of the week. Various team competitions requiring cooperation and using recyclable materials were conducted to a background of "peace" music. The winning homeroom was rewarded with donuts.

6. Dicky Ehrlich, a Holocaust survivor, spoke to the students at an assembly.

Evaluation

Two instruments were used: a survey of the faculty to determine their reaction to the project (Appendix 1); and a student assessment to attempt to determine the accomplishment of the learning objectives (Appendix 2).

Teacher Responses

All the teachers indicated that this was a valuable project. Three of the six commented that the cooperative approach helped in generating new ideas for projects and approaches,

In an attempt to datermine the extent to which a synergistic had occurred the teachers were asked to rank from 1(Not relevant) to 5(Completely successful) on a Synergy Checklist[1] such items as common goals, interdependence, empowerment, participative involvement, interaction, appreciative understanding, integration, and implementation, the average rank assigned by the veteran teachers was 3(Partially successful), while the new teachers assigned these an average rank of 4(Mostly successful).

Two of the veteran teachers and two new teachers indicated that the students were more involved and learned better than usual; the others thought that student response and interest were the same as usual.

One of the veteran teachers wrote lengthy comments stating that not all of the teachers were committed to the group effort and did not see it " as a unique learning opportunity," and because of this, "the benefits to the students" were lessened.

Student Responses

Question I was an attempt to determine whether students would tend to discriminate on the basis of racially identifiable names. No such bias was found.

Question II was suggested by the teachers. It asks the student what he would do if, when leaving the school, he saw that a fight was about to break out. It provoked interesting responses. Each teacher who administered the survey reported one or more students who asked "Should I answer this the way you want me to, or should I answer it honestly?" Seventeen (45%) of the responses were "Clap and shout with your classmates," and only three (8%) said they would go and get a teacher.

In response to the request to list groups which have experienced the effects of intolerance during this century, the students listed Jews, African Americans, Muslim women, Japanese, Chinese,

Albanians, Catholics, handicapped persons, Poles, Mexicans, Indians, homosexuals, Hispanics, and Germans.

When presented with sentences using the vocabulary words emphasized during the project, and asked to tell whether they were used correctly or incorrectly, the answers ranged from 97% correct (holocaust) to 53% correct (internment). The mean was 75% correct.

Statements illustrating stereotypes also generated questions from the students. Teachers reported many students who asked "Can all the answers be the same?", and observed students erasing "Yes" responses and changing them to "No." Twenty of the students responded that the statement "Japanese people are very skilled with math and computers." was not a stereotype. The other questions were answered correctly by 83% of the students.

When asked whether, as a result of this unit of study, there was anything about themselves they would like to change, fourteen students said they would like to change their temper or their attitudes toward others. Two wrote and signed pledges to improve their attitudes toward their work, their peers, and their teachers.

Conclusions

The generally positive responses of the new teachers indicate the project was successful. The teachers have already decided to repeat a "Peace Week" in the fall, and to attempt to find another school to cooperate with in studying tolerance. Improvements in students' relations with each other continue to be observed. Student groups in the cafeteria are less fixed than they were previously.

It was not easy for all of the faculty members to become involved in a group project. The topic was much more difficult to integrate into some disciplines than others. Some teachers had less self confidence than others, and were uncomfortable working in a group. There were indications that some thought the project took too much planning time and intruded too much into their class time, but the enthusiasm of the Social Studies teacher was contagious and spead to everyone.

Teachers were pleased with student response and generally agreed that more learning than usual had occurred.

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1. Lick, Dale W., *Synergy as a Tool to Enhance Learning and Classroom Effectiveness,* Annual Conference of the American Association of Teaching and Curriculum, October 1998

Appendix 1

You have been involved in a group effort to design and present an interdisciplinary unit on tolerance.

Please take a few minutes to respond to these questions concerning the process of planning and implementing this material, and the success of the project.

1. Please assess this project with respect to your progress in developing new approaches to teaching.
   ___ Very valuable
   ___ Valuable
   ___ Some value
   ___ No value

Comments:

2. Using the Synergy Checklist below, please give your assessment of how the team did from the point of view of synergy. Use the ratings:
   5 - Completely successful
   4 - Mostly successful
   3 - Partially successful
   2 - Not successful
   1 - Not relevant
   __ Common goals
   __ Interdependence
   __ Empowerment
   __ Participative involvement
   __ Interaction
   __ Appreciative understanding
   __ Integration
   __ Implementation

Comments:

3. Please assess the learning of your students as a result of the implementation of this project.
   __ Better than usual
   __ The same as usual
   __ Worse than usual

Comments:

4. Did you find that your students were interested in this material?
   __ More than usual
   __ The same as usual
   __ Less than usual

Comments:

Appendix 2

NAME _____

During Peace Week you studied the topic of tolerance in various ways in all your classes and had other opportunities to experience and practice tolerance on a school -wide basis. Your teachers wolud like to find out what kinds of things you learned during this week. Please answer these questions thoughtfully, and to the best of your ability.

I. You and a group of your classmates have been assigned to a group to collect some information about the kinds of things middle school students like to do in their spare time. The first thing your group must do is to decide which student will do each job for your group. One person will be the group leader. One person will be the recorder, who will keep track of the information you collect. One person will be in charge of writing your report, and one person will present the report orally to the class.

Besides yourself, the members of your group are :

- Li Foin, an above- average student
- Gloria Sanchez, an average student
- James Smith, who excels in athletics

Who would you assign to each job? Please write their letters in the blanks.

1. ___ Group Leader	a. Yourself
2. ___ Recorder	b. Li Foin
3. ___ Writer	c. Gloria Sanchez
4. ___ Presenter	d. James Smith

II. As you are about to leave the school one afternoon, you are attracted to a large, noisy group of students in a circle near the door. You approach the group and see that two students in the center of the circle are shouting at and shoving each other. What would you do? Please choose a, b, c, or d?

5. ___

a. Go to get a teacher.
b. Tell the students to stop.
c. Clap and shout with your classmates.
d. Try to break it up.

6. Before this week's study, were you aware that during this century a great number of groups have experienced the effects of intolerance?

Yes _____ No _____
Please list three or more such groups.

Study each of the following sentences. Decide whether the underlined word is used correctly or incorrectly in each sentence.

	Correct	Incorrect	
7.	_____	_____	Martin Luther King, Jr. preached <u>tolerance</u> as part of his message of non-violence.
8.	_____	_____	<u>Eugenics</u> is the study of man's evolution.
9.	_____	_____	Americans of Japanese descent endured <u>internment</u>

during the Second World War.

10. _____ _____ Pioneer, JVC, and Bose represent different kinds of stereotype.

11. _____ _____ Adolf Hitler foreshadowed his plan of genocide of the Jewish people in his book "Mein Kampf."

12. _____ _____ It is estimated that over six million Jews were killed in the holocaust.

13. _____ _____ Hatred for Asians and all things Asian is called anti-semitism.

14. _____ _____ Euthanasia represents the highest expression of man's mastery over nature.

Tell whether each of the following is an example of a stereotype.

	Yes	No	
15.	___	___	African-Americans are the best dancers.
16.	___	___	The French are good lovers.
17.	___	___	Short people are quick tempered.
18.	___	___	Fat people have no self-control.
19.	___	___	Japanese people are very skilled with math and computers.
20.	___	___	Women are very emotional.

After studying this unit, is there anything about yourself that you would like to change?

If so, how might you begin to make this change?

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